

# FIREFIGHTER

## TARGETS OF ATTACKS



**FIRE MAGAZINE**  
*Special offer inside*

**MARCH 2005**

# Your Vote, Your Voice

**I**N the last edition of *Firefighter* I made a plea not to let apathy elect the officials who will lead the union in the future and whose election will impact on the future of the fire service. Well, it did.

The turnout for the recent election for assistant general secretary was a disappointment. The winning candidate, Matt Wrack, secured the votes of around 11% of the membership. The runner up, John McGhee secured 10% of those votes, with Dean Mills securing 4%. Whilst congratulating Matt on his election I am sure that he shares my concern, as I am sure will John and Dean, at the turnout.

The nomination stage of the election of general secretary has now started and any ballot will be held in April. It is being argued by the supporters of one candidate that this election is a referendum on the handling of the pay dispute and in particular their view that the strikes should have continued.

I think this election is about the future and the type of leadership that can take our union and our service forward and in doing so best serve the interests of our members. Why do I not believe this election is a referendum on the pay dispute?

Quite simply, throughout the dispute and at every crucial stage, democratic decisions were made by our membership in full accordance with the union's rules. The truth is, some refused to accept those democratic decisions and sought to undermine them.

Let us remind ourselves of some of those key events:

- Unanimous decision of annual conference to endorse the pay claim;
- Unanimous decision of conference to ballot for industrial action in response to the employers' offer;
- Massive yes vote of the membership to undertake strike action in a high turnout ballot;
- Overwhelming vote to accept the June 2003 Agreement;
- Overwhelming vote in a consultative ballot of the membership to accept the outcome of the detailed negotiations on implementing the June Agreement;
- Unanimous decision of the executive council, after full consultation with



Whatever you do,  
vote in the election for  
the general secretary  
of our union, says  
Mike Fordham

the membership, to endorse in August 2004 the new grey book and the full implementation of the pay rises due at stages 2 and 3 of the agreement, thus bringing the dispute to an end.

Some now wish to argue that the attacks on pensions, jobs, fire cover and conditions of service are solely as a result of the handling by the leadership of the dispute. How naïve. Where have they been for the last 25 years?

I know where I have been and others within the same leadership they attack. They have been defending our members and our service from the worst excesses of those attacks and at the same time doing our best to take our service progressively forward.

The pension review started in the early 90s. Jobs have been lost in London and elsewhere, consistently over the last 20 years and, yes, there have been reductions in fire cover as a consequence. Conditions of service have been under attack from employers at a local and national level as far as our history goes back.

The government tried to abandon the old pay formula when the first payment was due back in the late 70s. In 1993 they tried to end it altogether. The current pensions attack is across the public sector and beyond.

To suggest this is new and as a result of the leadership's alleged mishandling of the dispute is both dishonest and opportunist. So what is this election about in my view?

It is not about the past. It is about the future.

It is about electing a general secretary who can take the union forward. It is about electing a general secretary who will ensure the union will stay strong, united and influential in the determining the future of our service and the conditions of service of our members within it. And it is your decision.

The union's rules do not allow me to canvass for nominations or votes on behalf of a candidate by letter, circular or any other written communication. I do, though, believe I have a right and a duty to inform the membership of my views in respect of the future of my union. I also believe that members expect me to have a view and to express it.



***So what is this election about in my view? It is not about the past. It is about the future.***

I also believe, as assistant general secretary and one of the "leadership" that I have a right and duty to urge members to participate in the process and vote.

I am not going to stoop to the level of those who hide behind anonymous names on a website or use anonymous flyers to spread their lies. I am not going to stoop to the level of those who – anonymously – are happy to set Murdoch's tabloid dogs against the national leadership of this union and their families. I know all the candidates in the AGS election condemned such actions and there is no place for it in our union.

I have been a national official for 26 years and a member of our union for nearly 37 years. I have never hidden my concern over the role of the extreme hard left in our Union and have always stood for election and re-election on that platform.

There is a vociferous group of hard left political opportunists within our union. They have a power base in London and a toehold in some other regions. They organised through 'Grassroots FBU' and undermined your position in the pay dispute.

They hope to, and have, capitalised on understandable disquiet or concerns about the pay deal – democratically accepted by our members – and hope to take control of this union for their own political ends.

You may ask: why should I care as I am retiring? The answer is simple: I care because the future of this union is important to all of us and the public we serve. It is important in securing your job, your pension and your future.

Whatever you do, vote. There will be stark choices before you. It is your vote and your voice.

*Nick Fadd*



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More and more firefighters face violent and premeditated assaults – and it's not just an inner-city problem



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SHOUTREPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK



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The FBU is joining other public service unions in a battle to protect our financial security in retirement



# Cautious welcome for consultation on future pension scheme funding

THE union has given a cautious welcome to a new ODPM consultation paper on the future funding of the pension scheme. The move follows criticism from the union – over a period of years – of the way the scheme operates.

The proposed changes would not affect the terms and conditions of the pension scheme but move away from the current ‘pay-as-you-go’ financing arrangements. It is this system which has allowed fire authorities and councils to spend pension contributions as they have been paid by members.

Under the proposals fire authorities would continue to run the scheme and pay firefighter pensions but this would be from a separate local pension account and no longer from the fire and rescue authorities’ current

accounts. Payments will be made from the new pensions account with the government making up any shortfall with neither local nor national taxpayers being disadvantaged.

These are similar arrangements to those used for other unfunded public service pension schemes such as for teachers, civil servants, NHS staff and the armed forces. It would apply to both the existing and the proposed new firefighter pension schemes.

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said: “This is a first step in the right direction and it deserves a cautious

welcome until we see all the details. It is clear the Government accepts that the problems with our scheme are unique.

“At present we have a scheme with no account, no fund and no money. Firefighters have paid large contributions towards their pension for years but fire

authorities and councils have spent all the money.

“This is a scandal and firefighters are not to blame for the current difficulties. We look forward to meeting

Phil Hope to explain our concerns about other Government proposals concerning our scheme.”

Fire and Rescue Service Minister Phil Hope said: “The new arrangements we are proposing would counter the current yearly volatility in pension expenditure and ensure that authorities’ budgets accurately reflect the cost of providing the frontline service.

“They would also ensure that fire and rescue authorities can plan effectively for future pension costs as these would be no different from other operational overheads such as salaries or national insurance contributions.”

This consultation is separate from the proposals for a new firefighter pension scheme and amendments to the existing firefighter pension scheme. The consultation period will close on 3 May 2005.

**‘We have a scheme with no account, no fund and no money. Firefighters have paid large contributions for years but authorities and councils have spent all the money’**

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FIREFIGHTERS working to current standard operating procedures (SOPs) reach dangerously high body core temperatures, recent research has revealed. It exposes serious flaws in the assumptions upon which SOPs are based

At meetings in January the FBU's national IRMP board and regional IRMP coordinators group considered the potential impact of recent research reports from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Building Assessment Disaster Group (BDAG).

BDAG was set up to consider the interaction of fire service procedures and equipment with buildings following the 9/11 terrorist attacks with a view to improving this interaction through improved building design.

However the research findings showed that the assumptions on which current standard operating procedures are based are flawed for some types of incident which firefighters are required to attend.

The research found that when working to current SOPs firefighters reach dangerously high body core temperatures before they can complete firefighting and rescue tasks. In simple terms this means that assumptions about what is 'humanly possible' and upon which current SOPs and emergency response planning are based are wrong.

These results have major implications for the fire and rescue service and the risk and task analysis systems that brigades should be adopting as part of the



**Post-9/11 research reveals serious concerns over current UK standard operating procedures**

## Research reveals serious flaws in standard operating procedures

move to integrated risk management planning.

Driving forward proper and risk-based emergency response planning that is based on the growing body of evidence that is

available to inform this planning is a major element in the FBU's current IRMP strategy.

■ To find out more about the FBU's IRMP strategy visit the FBU website: [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

## Matt Wrack elected assistant general secretary

MATT Wrack has been elected Assistant General Secretary in a full postal ballot.

He defeated National Officer John McGhee and EC member Dean Mills.

Matt, who is currently London Regional Secretary, will take up his position in September following the retirement of Mike Fordham.

The ballot, run by Electoral Reform Balloting Services, closed at 2pm on 4 February.

The independent scrutineer's report was as follows:

Number of voting papers returned: 14,205

Number of papers found to be invalid (blank/spoil): 437

Thus, total number of valid papers to be counted: 13,768

Result (1 to elect):

Bro Matt Wrack 6,260 ELECTED

Bro John McGhee 5,527

Bro Dean Mills 1,981

The ballot papers will be stored securely for a period of 12 months before being destroyed.

Nominations for the position of General Secretary were opened in the week beginning 7 February.

That ballot is scheduled to take place in April.

## MPs take stand against cuts and closures

MPS have tabled two early day motions (EDMs) calling for London and North Yorkshire fire authorities to halt potentially life threatening cuts in fire cover.

The firefighters group of MPs has tabled EDM 551 that calls for the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority not to proceed with the closure of Manchester Square Fire Station in the City of

Westminster and the removal of fire engines from Westminster, Knightsbridge, Kensington, Euston, Acton, Bethnal Green, Clerkenwell, Dockhead, Greenwich and Islington.

MPs Andrew Dismore, John McDonnell, John Cryer, Karen Buck, Kate Hoey and Neil Gerrard tabled the motion.

An EDM has also been tabled

demanding the withdrawal of proposed cuts in Harrogate (North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority), including a reduction in night cover.

EDM 569 was tabled by MPs Phil Willis, Bob Spink, Ann Cryer, Mike Hancock, Andrew Dismore and Alice Mahon.

An EDM is a kind of petition that allows MPs to put on record

their opinion on a subject and canvass support for it from fellow MPs, and can force a parliamentary debate on issues that would otherwise not be discussed.

■ Members are encouraged to urge their own MP to sign these EDMs. E-mail your MP by following the link from homepage of the FBU website.

# New Dimension penny-pinching 'pitiful' FBU warns government

THE FBU has criticised government for failing to provide the necessary funds for training and recruiting additional firefighters required to crew New Dimension equipment.

New Dimension was launched post 9/11 to review fire and rescue service preparedness for terrorist threats. Phase two of the programme included purchase of modern search and rescue equipment like heavy lifting gear, search cameras and high volume water pumps.

The union described the £14 million put aside by the government for extra training and personnel in England as "pitiful".

It was "equivalent to the Treasury's electricity bill, and swamped by the £412m the Department of Work and Pensions spent last year on consultants and only marginally more than Scotland's first minister spent on



**A New Dimension incident response unit**

paperclips and office sundries."

Lambasting Whitehall for ignoring FBU requests for an additional 1,000 full-time firefighters and the heavy reliance a badly understaffed retained service, the union noted a number of fire authorities were either axing jobs or, in the case of central London, moving them out of areas that

were major terrorist targets.

"Unlike the approach to the police and security services, the government intention is to strip away as much of the frontline fire and rescue service as they can get away with. How serious is that in terms of the response to a major terrorist incident?" the union asked.

■ Preparations for a fire and rescue service response to a terrorist attack in the West Midlands have hit the buffers after the regional management board refused to pay for a project manager for New Dimension. The board argued that New Dimension was an Office of the Deputy Prime Minister project and that it should pay for it.

## 81% vote for action on ambulance service

FBU members in Lincolnshire have voted 81% in favour of industrial action over the local fire authority's order to provide an ambulance service by 1 December 2004 or face disciplinary action and loss of pay.

In December, the union lodged a formal dispute over the issue of new duties being imposed without agreement.

"Brigade officials are immensely proud that so many members stood up to the bullying tactics of brigade management – the pressure on some of them, especially our retained comrades has been immense," said Barry Foster, Lincolnshire brigade secretary.

"The support of our comrades from across the country has been greatly appreciated, and I am sure that we can continue to rely on you all as we progress towards a properly negotiated resolution.



**Barry Foster: immensely proud of members' stand**

"Thanks also to all the officials and officers of the union who worked so hard on our behalf."

In November last year, members in Merseyside voted 68% to take industrial action after Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MF&RS) refused to negotiate with the local FBU officials and imposed a co-responding scheme.



## UNION CRITICISES 'WEAK' DUMPED CAR TARGET

THE Union has welcomed a Government decision to remove dumped cars from the streets, but has criticised the failure to set more ambitious targets.

FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said the cars were "arson magnets for kids" who blight their communities by setting them on fire.

"They are also used to lure firefighters into pre-arranged ambushes," he said. "The kids torch the cars and wait for firefighters to arrive to attack them.

"But we feel the reduction targets have been seriously weakened.

The Government needs to have a more challenging target than simply reducing car arson to the levels they inherited from the Tories."

# FBU wins £6m compensation for members

THE FBU won £6 million last year for members injured at work, statistics from FBU lawyers Thompsons reveal. Around 800 new cases were opened in England, Scotland and Wales.

Damages range from a few hundred pounds for members with relatively minor injuries sustained on duty or away from work, to many thousands for those more seriously injured and sometimes unable to return to firefighting duties.

Cases include that of Kieron Farrell who was off duty near his home in Sheldon, Birmingham, when he was hit by a speeding car. The impact shattered his knee and despite treatment his GP said it was unlikely that he could return to firefighting duties with West Midlands Fire Service.

Kieron was medically retired from the service and received £54,000 compensation, which consisted mainly of loss of earnings.

"It was night time and the 18-year-old driver cut a corner at speed and just didn't see me. I was pleased of course to get the money but at the end of the day I lost my job after 38 years service and that was a big blow," Kieron said.

David Williams, a retained firefighter with North Wales Fire Service, received £228,756.72 after his own career and his ability to

be a firefighter were ended when he shattered a leg falling from a ladder. Flames had suddenly surged through the roof of the building he was attending, causing him to lose his balance and fall onto a concrete floor.

Michael Thomas, another firefighter who could no longer work after being injured on duty, received £188,500.00. He fractured his right ankle when he fell through a hole in the floor at an industrial storage premises in Newport in January 2001.

John Brindley was carrying a ladder across the appliance bay ladder at Holloway Fire Station in North London when he tripped over broken pieces of concrete by a drainage gully. The state of the floor had previously been reported but it was only repaired after the accident.

John broke his index finger in the accident and was unable to work again as a firefighter. He received £40,000 compensation.

FBU general secretary Andy Gilchrist commented: "It is unacceptable that so many of our members are being injured each year. But while no amount of money can compensate for injury, or the loss of a career, the fact that the FBU's legal service is winning so much for injured members is yet again proof of the value of union membership."



**Andy Gilchrist: Awards prove value of union membership**

## MORE LEGAL WINS ...

**TWO injury compensation claims have been settled recently with the Mid and West Wales Fire Authority.**

**One member suffered whiplash and psychological injuries when his fire engine skidded on mud and crashed into a tree. The authority admitted liability for the negligent driving of its employee and paid £7,500 in damages.**

**Another member, a retained fire fighter, was attending an emergency call to a factory fire. He fractured his tibia and suffered injuries to his knee and ankle when he was thrown off balance from the force of a suction which had become detached.**

**The authority admitted liability on the basis that the hard suction had been incorrectly connected. He received £5,700 in compensation.**

## Pregnant? Don't suffer in silence

WOMEN have served in the fire service for many years but employers still cannot come to terms with pregnancy.

When Sam Rye, Region 3 women's representative, became pregnant for the first time it all seemed a shock to her bosses.

"What were they going to do with me? I think a dark cupboard away from prying eyes might have been their preferred choice, but with some hard work from a National Women's Committee union rep we eventually got the matter sorted out," said Sam.

Her employer's attitudes have made being a mother a tough experience, but she hasn't been put off and recommends that other women members "go for it" too.

Since having her first child, Sam has moved brigade and decided to have another two children. "I have decided that nothing short of a rugby team is going to be enough for me now as I want to see my employers get it right without all the fuss. Anybody would think that I had been impregnated by an alien from outer space," Sam said.

"There are some brigades out there that are making an effort to make being pregnant in the fire service not such a commotion. But not nearly enough is being done.

"If any of you out there are pregnant, contemplating becoming pregnant or are on maternity leave and feel you have been treated without the dignity and respect that you deserve please don't suffer in silence."

If you are pregnant and want advice contact your region's rep on the National Women's Committee (details on [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk)). The website also contains the FBU model maternity policy. All enquiries are dealt with in confidence.



**Sam Rye: Go for it!**

## ON THE MOVE?



**Members are reminded to advise their brigade membership secretary of any change of address.**

**Head office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.**



# Double death of firefighters touches the entire service

THE deaths of two Hertfordshire firefighters has touched the fire service across the UK, the union has said. The two men died in an attempt to rescue a member of the public trapped in a high rise block of flats.

One person was rescued but was seriously injured. Another seven were taken to hospital and over 70 others led to safety when the 14th floor of a 16-storey block in Harrow Court, Stevenage, caught fire in the early hours of the morning of 2 February.

Firefighters Michael Millar, 26 and Jeff Wornham, 28, both died after a vain search for a woman trapped in the fire. She also died. Two other firefighters were injured.

At the height of the fire



**Jeff Wornham**

around 60 firefighters from across Hertfordshire were involved. Andy Gilchrist, the Fire Brigades Union general secretary said: "Such tragedies are felt very deeply across the entire UK fire service. For those who work in it, the fire



**Michael Millar**

service is like a family.

"We are deeply saddened at the loss of our two colleagues who died in the line of duty. We are also saddened at the death of a member of the public.

"Our deepest sympathies are

with the families of those who died or were injured. It sounds old fashioned, but we all hurt at times like this."

A series of investigations have been launched.

A special fund has also been set up.

The fire service will administer the trust fund which will be known as The Stevenage Firefighters' Fund. Two trustees will be appointed from the service and all money donated will be paid to the next of kin.

All cheques/donations should be sent to: c/o Chief Fire Officer, Service HQ, Old London Road, Hertford, Herts, SG13 7LD

Please make cheques payable to "The Stevenage Firefighters Fund."

## Night out ended in horrific attack and court battle for compensation

NIGHTCLUB operators Luminar have been found responsible for an attack by a doorman which left a Southend firefighter with severe head injuries. Doorman Jeffrey Warren received a two-year suspended prison sentence for his attack on David Hawley in August 2000.

Luminar will have to pay substantial compensation to David Hawley, who may never be able to return to fighting fires. David's claim for compensation has been backed throughout by the Fire Brigades Union.

David (aged 30 at the time) was punched in the face by Warren outside the Chicago Rock Cafe in Southend. He was hit with such force that he fell back, hitting his head on the kerb, suffering a severe head injury from which he has not recovered.

David was out with a group of colleagues from Southend fire station in the early hours of 18 August 2000 when another group started a confrontation. The door

staff came out to calm things down and Warren approached David, who held his hands in the air as a gesture of not wanting any trouble.

But Warren punched him hard in the face. He fractured his skull, nose and jaw, in addition to knocking him to the pavement.

In his judgment, issued after a four-day High Court hearing in January, Mr Justice Wilkie said: "Luminar is vicariously liable for the conduct of Mr Warren on the 18 August and is liable to Mr Hawley for the injuries caused by Mr Warren's unlawful conduct towards him".

Honor Lamont of FBU solicitors Thompsons, commented: "This ruling is very important and a great relief. It means that we can pursue Luminar for compensation for the terrible injuries David suffered at the hands of Warren and for the loss of his career as a fire fighter.

"I hope that this ruling will send a message to corporations like Luminar. They cannot hide behind others to avoid their duty of care to customers."

## TWO ARE JAILED FOR TEN YEARS FOR MANSLAUGHTER OF RICHARD JENKINS

TWO men have each been jailed for 10 years after being found guilty of the manslaughter of firefighter Richard Jenkins.

Christopher Raisis, 25, and Jamie Evans, 20, were found guilty of manslaughter at Cardiff Crown Court on 31 January.

Richard Jenkins, 28, was killed when a gas canister exploded in a fire at a building known as "the old bingo hall" in the Ely area of Cardiff early on May 23 last year.

Two other firefighters were injured.

Raisis, Evans and a third man, Craig Sterio, 31, were also found guilty of intimidation, robbery and two charges of actual bodily

harm. Raisis and Evans were each jailed for 10 years.

They had a string of previous convictions. Sterio was jailed for four years and has also served a string of jail terms.

Judge Mr Justice Forbes said this was "a very serious and very tragic case".

He said Mr Jenkins, "a much-loved family man" had died as the result of "wanton vandalism".

An independent expert had told the court that the fire was started deliberately and that there were two seats of fire.

Someone set fire to items, causing the fire service inevitably to arrive and Mr Jenkins to be in the lobby when the explosion happened.





*Rodney Bickerstaffe addresses a pensioners' protest in London*

# Pensions justice for all

Pensioner and trade union movements must continue to work together to defend existing pension schemes and promote a credible alternative to the current crisis, says Rodney Bickerstaffe, President of the National Pensioners Convention

OVER the last 12 months the issue of pensions has risen up the political agenda and captured the headlines. Even the most cautious commentator now accepts that pensions are in crisis – and apart from ‘gold-plating’ their own pension arrangements – politicians have so far done very little to effectively tackle the problem.

The recent interim report from the Pensions Commission laid out in stark terms the scale of the problem.

Britain has one of the least generous state pension systems in the developed world and 75 per cent of workers currently paying into a defined contribution occupational pension scheme will not receive big enough payouts in retirement to escape means-tested benefits.

But despite the issue of pensions only now beginning to make the front pages, the root of the problem goes back a long way.

On coming to power in 1997, ministers announced their intention to reverse the ratio of existing pension provision of 60% state and 40% private and put their faith in an industry which has been dogged by corruption, scandal and mis-management.

At the same time, those with an occupational pension now find that their final salary schemes are also under threat. Millions of public sector workers – including those in the fire service – are facing changes in their pension schemes and retirement ages, and the prospect of a two-tier pension system in the future is looming large.

For millions of other workers, particularly women and the low paid, having an occupational pension of any description is pure fantasy.

The pensioners of tomorrow are therefore being

forced to gamble their hard earned retirement on a system based on the economics of the casino.

That is why the pensioner and trade union movements must continue to work together to defend existing pension schemes and promote a credible alternative to the current crisis.

For millions of today's pensioners and future generations, the state pension provides the most effective way of delivering financial security and dignity to all in retirement.

It must be substantially raised, linked to average earnings and paid to all, to ensure that pensioners get to share in the growing prosperity of the nation that they helped to create.

More must also be done to make entitlement to a full state pension easier for women, part-time workers and the low paid to achieve, by relaxing the current rules on qualifying years, caring for dependents and national insurance credits.

But fundamentally, we must also have a debate about how society prepares for and funds its retirement. There has to be a clear rejection of the idea that we cannot afford to pay for an ageing population. With the fourth strongest economy in the world, Britain can certainly do better than the pitiful weekly state pension it currently offers of less than £80 a week.

In the coming general election, we will be asking all candidates to support our Pensioners' Manifesto and the policies that can give everyone a decent income in their later years. FBU members can help by pledging their support by visiting [www.pensionersmanifesto.co.uk](http://www.pensionersmanifesto.co.uk) and getting involved in the campaign.



*General Secretary  
Andy Gilchrist speaking  
at the public service  
unions pensions rally  
in November*

# Protecting our pensions

The FBU is joining other public service unions in a battle to protect our financial security in retirement

AS *Firefighter* went to press, FBU members from across the country were preparing to take part in the TUC-co-ordinated campaigning day of activities on the issue of public service pensions on February 18 and to meet their MPs to press home our concerns about the government proposals on the Firefighters Pension Scheme and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

The day of action was to involve unions in the TUC's Public Services Liaison Group (PSLG) arguing the case to protect public sector pensions in their local and regional media, organise local rallies and other campaign events, and put pressure on local constituency MPs. To coincide with the campaign day, the TUC was seeking a meeting with David Miliband, the Cabinet Office minister with responsibility for the Public Services Forum.

At a meeting in January of the PSLG, which includes Unison, TGWU, GMB, PCS and the FBU, it was reported that senior members of the TUC would meet the political office of No.10 Downing St to discuss the governments' pensions proposals and to set up a meeting with the senior government ministers.

The FBU has been consulting members on the proposed changes to the FPS/local government pension scheme and on a new union strategy to protect pension benefits.

Details of the union's proposed strategy were sent to members' home addresses along with a detailed analysis that the union has submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Members were asked to attend branch

meetings to let their views be heard about the future of their pensions and how the union should take the campaign forward – including what action needs to be taken.

Other unions are also consulting members. Unison members, faced with detrimental changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme, have backed a ballot for industrial action and now the decision to go ahead with a ballot lies with Unison's National Executive Committee.

Although the changes to the various pension schemes vary from sector to sector, the PSLG unions are united in their desire to preserve decent pensions for workers across the public services. Of particular concern is the government's determination to increase the retirement age for all public sector workers.

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said: "The FBU is currently consulting members and they are angry. Our scheme is not generous, we get out what we put in and we pay a lot more than anyone else.

"Our scheme was in surplus for years but they spent all of the money instead of investing it. In the absence of any change in the Government's intention to rob our pensions it is highly likely we will be balloting members."

***Of particular concern is the government's determination to increase the retirement age for all public sector workers***



# Extreme and unfair

Key points in the FBU response  
to the government's proposals  
on firefighters' pensions

THE union submitted its "technical response" to the Office of the Deputy Prime Ministers' proposals on the Firemen's Pension Scheme (FPS) under the consultation process. Below are the key points:

- The FBU does not accept the figures given for the cost of funding the FPS. The actuarial assumptions are extreme.
- The FPS has, historically, been very similar to the Police Pension Scheme. The FBU believes that the current proposals to move away from this position are ill-conceived.
- The FBU does not believe that a new pension scheme is necessary or desirable for new entrants to the service. To have two firefighters doing the same job with different pension benefits is divisive and unfair.
- The FBU welcomes the admission of retained firefighters to the FPS. They are strongly of the view that control room workers should be admitted as well.
- The FBU rejects the proposal to increase the minimum pension age for firefighters to 55. To do so will create an aging Fire and Rescue Service.
- The government has still not produced proposals for revisions to the injury benefits arrangements for firefighters. The FBU cannot see why they could not be produced at the same time as pension proposals and cannot see how they can be implemented with effect from April 2006, as the government proposes, if adequate consultation is to be allowed.
- The FBU strongly rejects the proposal that full ill-health pensions will be payable only where the applicant is unfit to perform work of any nature at all. An ill health pension should be paid if a firefighter is unfit to perform the duties of his or her own job.
- The FBU welcomes the proposal to provide survivors' benefits to unmarried partners in the future but believes that it is unjust and archaic not to do so for the unmarried partners of current firefighters as well.

## THE SIMILARITY WITH POLICE PENSIONS

The FPS and Police Pension Schemes have historically been very similar. A full pension is built up after 30 years

**A deeply  
cynical  
manipulation  
of the  
pension  
scheme to  
discourage  
applicants  
to the  
service at  
the expense  
of current  
firefighters**



service, and a firefighter or police officer with 30 years service can draw his or her pension at age 50.

Similar arrangements will still be in place for police officers. The FPS will, under the government's proposals, be more closely aligned with the local government pension scheme.

The government justifies this by downplaying the dangerous nature of a firefighter's job: they say that it is "only" the 23rd most dangerous job in the country. But the police service comes 24th on the same list!

It also says that decent pension arrangements must be kept in place for the police service in order to recruit and retain police officers, whereas it is easier to recruit firefighters.

That is a deeply cynical manipulation of the pension scheme to discourage applicants to the service at the expense of current firefighters. The FBU does not seek to downgrade the difficult and stressful nature of the work of local government officials, but we think that the nature of a firefighter's job is radically different and their likely career span is much more like a police officer's.

## THE FUNDING OF THE FPS

The FBU has sought actuarial assistance with the government's costing of the provision of pensions and other benefits under the FPS. Actuarial expertise comes down to matters of opinion, but within acceptable ranges. The life expectancy assumptions made by the government are at the extreme end of the acceptable range. They overstate the life expectancy of firefighters, making the FPS look more expensive than it really is.

The government complains that the level of ill-health retirements is, in its view, unacceptably high. Each case

is considered on its own merits by the fire authority concerned. Is the government saying that the fire authorities are letting through undeserving cases? That is certainly not the FBU's experience.

### THE PROPOSED NEW PENSION SCHEME

The government proposes to introduce a brand new scheme for firefighters who join the service after 1st April 2006. The proposed new scheme will be cheaper to join, with contributions of 6%, but will provide much worse benefits: it would take 40 years to build up a full pension, normal retirement age would be 60 or even 65, ill health benefits will only be paid if the firefighter concerned is unfit for any work at all and, incredibly, widow's and widower's benefits would be reduced.

No-one asked us if we wanted to reduce our own pension contributions. We would rather pay the current 11% and get a better pension scheme. To have two firefighters working side by side earning different pensions or, even worse, suffering the same injury and getting different pensions or no pension at all is divisive.

### CONTROL ROOM STAFF PENSIONS

At present, control room staff are entitled to join the local government pension scheme but not the FPS. We believe that they should be admitted to the FPS: they have incredibly stressful jobs. They have to hang on to the line to members of the public who are in danger of their lives. They save lives – commendations are awarded to control room operators – and they will also attend big firegrounds. It is time to recognise that this is a career which a person cannot be expected to continue for 40 years.

### NEW NORMAL RETIREMENT AGE

The government proposes that in the new scheme, the normal retirement age will be 60 or even 65. In the existing scheme, they propose that the normal retirement age will go up from 50 to 55 with effect from 2013.

The older members of the fire and rescue service will still have to be paid and that means fewer new recruits. The government seems to think that there are desk and community liaison jobs available for all of these older firefighters who are not fit enough to do the job they joined up for – fighting fires – and unless the establishment numbers increase then the salaries being paid to these older workers will mean less money to recruit younger men and women.

Increasing the retirement age will also mean more ill-health retirements. This is a physically stressful job and the older you get, the more likely you are to suffer from the chronic illnesses such as osteo-arthritis which prevent a person from performing any active job, never mind fighting fires.

### NEW INJURY BENEFITS SCHEME

The current FPS includes arrangements for paying pensions to firefighters who are injured on the job. The

government proposes to create a different injury benefit scheme, on the basis that Inland Revenue restrictions prevent such benefits being paid by a pension scheme.

But this new injury benefit scheme has not even been produced for consultation. It is inextricably linked with the ill-health pensions which the FPS will continue to provide and the (much worse) benefits which the proposed new scheme will contain. This new scheme will be in force, according to the government, from April 2006. How can there be proper consultation on that timescale? If the government has been working on proposals then where are they? If they cannot be produced now then the new injury benefit scheme and the proposals for new pension arrangements should be delayed until we have been given a proper opportunity to consider them and discuss them with the government.

### ILL-HEALTH PENSIONS

The government proposes that in the new scheme and potentially in the existing scheme there will be a two-tier ill-health pension arrangement: if a firefighter is unfit to perform a job within their role as a firefighter they would get an immediate pension but without the enhancements which are currently provided. They would only be paid if the firefighter was unfit to perform any work at all for any employer.

Firefighting is a physically demanding job. It is not surprising that the number of ill-health retirements is greater than elsewhere. If a firefighter is cast out of the service in their fifties it is not realistic to expect them to walk into another job. That is why enhancements were paid in the first place: to make up for the working life that an injured firefighter would not be able to complete. That justification is still there.

### UNMARRIED PARTNERS

The proposed new scheme will provide survivor pensions to unmarried partners in a stable relationship. The same provision will not be made available to existing firefighters under the government's proposal.

It is high time that the FPS recognised that society has changed since 1948 when the FPS was first introduced. It is almost universal practice for private sector pension schemes to pay benefits to unmarried partners and the government should be following best practice.



**HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS!**

To lobby your MP visit [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

Log on and go to 'Lobby your MP'. Simply put in your postcode and the campaign kit will identify your MP and his or her email address. Two minutes and three clicks is all it takes.



# Targets and victims



More and more firefighters  
face violent and premeditated  
assaults – and it's not just  
an inner-city problem

**F**ROM the streets of Northern Ireland, from South Wales, Scotland, the north west of England to the county of Royal Berkshire, a problem is rapidly getting worse.

There appears to be an increasing number of attacks on firefighters, some of them pre-planned ambushes, mainly by gangs of youths throwing bricks and bottles.

Roads have been blocked and firefighters attacked when forced to stop. Some attacks have involved guns and fireworks.

If asked, most of the public might associate such attacks with deprived areas in the inner areas of major cities. But it is not quite as simple as that.

Those areas have their problems, but violence against firefighters is not confined to the inner city areas, as Eddie Cardoso, FBU Brigade Secretary in Berkshire, explains. Berkshire was the scene of a recent incident where youths set fire to mattresses and other material in a public park and attacked the firefighters who arrived to put the fires out.

"People who don't live here think of Berkshire as Windsor Castle, Eton School and Royal Ascot" says Eddie. "But like most other brigades we have areas which are either trouble spots or potential trouble spots. This isn't just about inner cities."

Brigades like Greater Manchester do have their problems as Kevin Brown told us. "Youngsters are no

*The  
Northern  
Ireland  
Fire  
Service's  
poster*



longer satisfied with making hoax calls so they can hear the sirens and see the blue flashing lights. They are setting light to cars, rubbish, derelict buildings. We have had some incidents where this has been done to lure us in so they can attack us.

"Some have been planned ambushes. In one incident they used fireworks with scaffolding poles used as makeshift rocket launchers as well as brick and bottles".

And a hard-pressed police service is not always there to offer support as Les Skarretts in Merseyside explains. "We have real problems in some areas of Merseyside" he says.

"The police have been called for support but most of the time they are so busy themselves that they have no one to spare unless we tell them that our lives are in danger."

Finding accurate figures about the number of



Even a quick trawl of media reports suggests a rapidly rising number of attacks on firefighters, and, increasingly, a number of planned ambushes. Some reports suggest that some parts of the country are “almost no-go areas”. In parts of the UK the attacks are coming almost on a daily basis. Some are so frequent that crews do not even bother to report them. These are only a selection from local news reports.

**ASHINGTON,**  
Northumberland, 18  
November 2004 5.30  
pm: Firefighters  
come under attack  
from brick throwing  
youths as they  
tackle a rubbish fire  
which may have been  
started deliberately  
by the youths in order  
to lure firefighters  
into an ambush, say  
reports.

***‘The police have been  
called for support but  
most of the time they are  
so busy themselves that  
they have no one to spare  
unless we tell them that  
our lives are in danger’***

attacks is difficult as few brigades systematically collect figures. This is not a problem that is only faced by the fire service. Large number of employers are in the same boat according to Linda Shanahan, FBU brigade secretary from Fife.

Linda chairs a steering group set up by the Scottish Executive (similar to the United Kingdom Cabinet) on the protection of workers serving the public.

“It has been difficult to get an accurate picture on the number of assaults happening to any group of workers,” she says. “Research is scarce, but that’s what we need before the scale of the problem can be identified.

“We found that only the British Transport Police were actively encouraging staff to report all incidents. Although most workers, including those in the fire service, have a number of anecdotal examples, you need the hard figures before you can get a true picture of the scale of the problem before moving towards a strategic solution.

“In Scotland brigades introduced reporting procedures in April 2003. With credible statistics we can then work out training needs and what needs to be done for all those workers who face violence at work.”

And publicity about the issues can create problems. “We have always been a bit wary of publicising incidents of



violence or abuse because we feared copycat incidents," says Linda.

"There is a balance to be reached and ways in which we can approach the issue without prompting copycat incidents while getting them to stop the attacks."

In Scotland they have gone a step further with the Scottish Executive introducing an Emergency Workers Bill making it a specific offence to assault or obstruct an emergency worker. It is on similar lines to the offence of assaulting or obstructing a police officer.

Linda says in Scotland they will assess the impact the new law has before passing judgment on it. "We are uncertain what impact the law will have so we have to wait and see.

"The police told us the existing offence relating to them was usually plea bargained away, one reason why we are cautious. That's why what we are trying to do is concentrate on stopping assaults in the first place."

Some of that work at UK level is being co-ordinated by the Health and Safety Executive. It has set up the inelastically named interdepartmental committee on violence towards staff. This committee has recently established five task groups covering specific groups of workers, including 'protective services' on which the FBU will be represented.

The committee is a national trade union-government-conflict management specialist partnership to tackle the problem of violence at work across all sectors of the workforce. And it is that type of working partnership which can be critical to the success of a campaign.

The partnership approach is supported by experience in Northern Ireland, as Peter Craig Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Safety) Northern Ireland Fire Brigade explains.

Northern Ireland has suffered serious and sustained incidents for many years, including a firefighter being shot dead while tackling a fire.

"In 2004 we had almost 500 attacks; and it is on the increase. The brigade and the union both agreed there was clearly a problem and agreed that we would work together to do whatever we could to tackle it."

Northern Ireland may be different to other brigades. What it terms civil disturbance calls – ranging from street riots to terrorist attacks resulting in loss of life – have been recorded throughout the troubles there.

"As 'the troubles' subsided, a bit of normality returned and the peace process got underway, we continued to record what we call 'CD calls'," says Peter Craig. "With the beginning of the peace process we expected the number of civil disturbance recordings to drop. It soon became clear that the opposite was true and firefighters were being subjected to more attacks than during the troubles.

"We tried to engage with other emergency services who were facing similar problems. It was regularly on the local news, for example, that ambulance crews were being attacked. There were even attacks in hospital A&E departments. We lobbied within the fire service and the union continued to lobby politicians."

The result was that in late 2003 a joint venture was agreed between the fire service and other emergency service personnel. Basically they adopted the same model that has been used to drive down fire deaths by 68% in the previous five years as it had proved effective and efficient.

A four-stage process was agreed.

Stage one was to make it an issue of public debate.

**MERSEYSIDE,**  
**5 November 2004:**  
**police had to disperse**  
**a crowd of youths**  
**pelting firefighters**  
**with bricks as they**  
**tried to put out a**  
**bonfire.**  
**Litherland, 6**  
**November 2004:**  
**crew**  
**lured into an alley by**  
**a fake 999 call and**  
**attacked with bricks.**

**NORTHERN IRELAND:**  
**Belfast, Ormeau**  
**Avenue area, 6 June**  
**2002: car set on fire**  
**to lure in firefighters.**  
**Windscreen smashed**  
**by brick.**  
**Coleraine 21 July**  
**2002: two fire**  
**engines withdrawn**  
**after they were**  
**damaged in an attack.**  
**Sandy Row area of**  
**Belfast: 28 July 2002**  
**area: firefighters**  
**attacked and one**  
**engine damaged.**  
**Belfast, Shankhill 30**  
**July 2002: fire crew**  
**attacked by stone**  
**throwers, smashing**  
**the driver's window.**

**STRATHCLYDE:**  
**Hamilton, 26 August**  
**2002: Hamilton:**  
**firefighter shot in**  
**the head by an airgun**  
**pellet while going to a**  
**999 call. Crew had to**  
**divert to Hairmyres**  
**Hospital near East**  
**Kilbride.**  
**Attacks in East**  
**Kilbride, Coatbridge,**  
**Lanark and Old**  
**Kilpatrick: missiles**  
**and fireworks thrown**  
**in a wave of attacks**  
**which smashed one**  
**windscreen and left**  
**two firefighters**  
**injured.**

**The way forward was not**  
**catching and prosecuting**  
**the youngsters but to**  
**say: 'Look. What you do is**  
**stupid, it's harming your**  
**community.'**

Stage two was to put in place a targeted education campaign which included targeting the media.

Stage three was deciding that the way forward was not catching and prosecuting the youngsters but, as Peter Craig puts it, "to say: 'Look. What you do is stupid, it's harming your community'."

"The final stage was to create engagement strategies where you get groups of 12 youngsters who are involved or are likely to be involved in this sort of behaviour and talk to them," he says. "They would tell us they were doing this because they were bored and fed up and we would basically tell them we were bored and fed up of them throwing bricks at us."

The first stage of the programme was rolled out in December 2003. It included two television adverts, itself a ground-breaking move, giant advertising posters, posters for bus stops and other smaller advertising. The message was direct and simple: We are the targets and you are the victims.

The message was clear says Tony Maguire of the FBU Northern Ireland: "We are getting hurt, yes. But you and your communities are suffering. A lot of the poster advertising was specifically targeted in the worst areas to raise awareness and the independent research suggests the targeting exercise was successful.

"In the worst areas the children or the youngsters were fully aware of the campaign. In Stage 3 we started looking at the LIFE Project (Local Internal Fire Education) which was being run in London and the Phoenix which was being run in Tyne and Wear."

The first pilot LIFE scheme is now up and running. It involves getting the community engaged with fire officers and firefighters. Funding for future schemes will be dependent on the success of the pilot.

"Basically the LIFE project targets young people who have, for example, been excluded from school or are the subject of antisocial behaviour orders. We bring them in and engage them with the fire service.

"They will go through a mini recruits course, they will be eating meals with the local firefighters, they will be doing some of our training and we will be putting them through their paces so they can see how operational firefighters work for a week. It is direct engagement. We can ask them: 'Why are you doing this? Look at what we do.'"

The union has been working with the Northern Ireland

**CLEVELAND, June 2002:** firefighters attacked with bricks and stones as they tackled a fire in derelict council houses.

**SOUTH WALES:** Trelewis, near Merthyr Tydfil, 23 October 2003: firefighter needs emergency treatment after being hit on the head with a brick while attending a rubbish fire. In another incident on Methyr's Galon Estate fire crews were lured into the area and faced road blocks and a hail of bricks and stones. South Wales: October 2004: a series of attacks in Aberfan, Gilfach Goch after fires started to lure crews in. Crews attacked with stones and bricks.



**WEST MIDLANDS:** Walsall, Jan 17, 2005: firefighters attacked as they tackled a building fire by youths as young as 12 throwing bricks, stones and bottles. One firefighter hit with a brick. Police who were called to help also attacked.

**HALIFAX, West Yorkshire** September 2004: authority says 30 firefighters attacked in previous 5 months. Attacks have included stone and brick throwing youths.

**COVENTRY 24** October 2004: Fire crews in Coventry were attacked by a stone and brick throwing teenage gang while they dealt with a fire

brigade to put a workable strategy in place while continuing to lobby politicians for sustainable funding for the initiative. Advertising campaigns will coincide with the brigade beginning the engagement process with the youngsters.

Jim Barbour points out that the Northern Ireland experience is different to the rest of the UK. "On one hand we have the type of hooligan attack familiar in other areas, on the other we have politically motivated violence. In recent weeks there have been 23 incendiary attacks on commercial premises and it is not unknown for firefighters to be the target of pipe bombs.

"Initiatives such as the LIFE scheme cannot address these issues. We in the FBU will continue to explore and support any scheme aimed at driving down the incidence of attacks on our members, but we find it frustrating that despite the acknowledged upsurge of attacks, the Fire authority is seeking to review payment of the Northern Ireland allowance."

One of the central questions always asked about attacks is 'Why do the youngsters do it?' To get there you have to get beyond the first natural instinct which may be that they need a bloody good hiding.

Despite efforts, the Firefighter could find no one in the service who thought that would actually work. But directly engaging with youngsters in carefully targeted areas does work.

"Engaging with youngsters and understanding why they do it helps us tackle the problem," says Joe Heron of the FBU Northern Ireland. "Talking to them, it is clear

**COUNTY DURHAM 23** September 2001: A 23-year-old man was jailed for three-and-a-half years on Monday for biting off part of a firefighter's ear as the officer tackled a car fire.

**LOTHIAN AND BORDERS:** Musselburgh November 2004: A FIREFIGHTER was shot with an airgun and other crew members were stoned after being ambushed by teenage gang.

that the biggest problem is boredom.

"They also know there is little we can do about it and that we will always come back when we get the next call. They also know the fire service will react immediately and we will arrive, which can't always be said of other emergency services. But the engagement process is vital. It can and does impact on the youngsters.

"What they do is stupid, but the youngsters themselves are not stupid. We say: 'Look, what if you bricked a machine and it's wrecked and later you're home in bed and your house is on fire, who's going to get you out? If you stop bricking us, we'll get there quicker. To their credit most of them will go away and think about it."

And it is that direct engagement which is seen to be vital. "The reality is we can't stop them from throwing bricks at us," says Peter Craig.

"The only people that can do that are the communities themselves. It's getting the message across that when we are heading for a 999 call we want to get there as fast as we can and as safely as we can.

"If machines are getting wrecked there's always going to be that suspicion, an element of doubt if you are called to an area where you know there have been problems. You might go that little bit slower. You might go that little bit more cautiously and we know with what we do that can mean the difference between getting someone out alive or not.

"Yes, we are the targets. But ultimately it's the communities and those that live in them that are the real victims."



## EVEN ONE ATTACK IS UNACCEPTABLE

**EVEN** one attack on one firefighter is unacceptable. And we all know they have happened over the years and no doubt heard of them within our brigades if not experienced them ourselves.

For a number of years it was a strongly held view that if these attacks were publicised – if they were made a public issue – then we could have faced copycat attacks. There was a certain degree of logic to that, because local experience was that copycat incidents could and did occur.

But the picture we have put together – based on some of the evidence available and some examples which have been highlighted – suggests a very worrying trend.

The clear indications are that attacks are increasing alarmingly. And they are not confined to the inner areas of the big cities.

We must all find it sickening that any such attacks occur. To have firefighters – or any public servants – attacked while trying to carry out work of such importance to public safety is simply not acceptable.

To hear of crews attacked while tackling house fires or on the way to house fires almost defies belief. As are the increasing number of attacks which appear to be pre-planned ambushes.

I doubt if there are any quick fixes to the problem. If there were they would have been found them already.



*Andy Gilchrist:  
No quick fixes*

And yes, there are a number of initiatives at brigade and other levels which have tried to stem and reverse what seems to be a growing problem. Many of these involve engaging with local communities and a direct hands-on approach which has worked well with, for example, fire safety campaigns.

Those initiatives need to be applauded and supported. But we are also working at other levels such as in Scotland and at national level with the Health and Safety Executive.

We will be doing more detailed work in this policy area. Our feeling is that more needs to be done before either a firefighter is killed or someone dies in a fire because pumps have been delayed or taken off the run because they have been damaged.

**Andy Gilchrist, General Secretary**

**CORBY,**  
Northamptonshire  
19 August 2003:  
crews lured to five  
deliberate fires and  
attacked with bricks  
and stones on all  
five occasions. Fire  
engines had been  
stoned and had  
lights and windows  
smashed in the  
previous seven days.

**OLLERTON,**  
Nottinghamshire  
18 October 2003:  
teenage gang attack  
firefighters with  
bricks and bottles  
while attending a  
fire. One firefighter  
punched in the face.  
One youth jailed for  
15 months for the  
attack.

## Needed: the hard facts

TONY Bryant, a temporary assistant divisional officer in Greater Manchester, is carrying out an in-depth study of the problem of attacks on firefighters as part of a management training course. His dissertation is due this summer.

"I have been through all the ranks in the busiest inner city stations in Manchester and it is clear to me there is a problem," he says. "I was born and brought up on one of the roughest council estates in Manchester and what is happening shocks me."

Tony was so concerned he set up a group four years ago to get together the stations in Manchester with the biggest problems: Salford, Wythenshawe, Central, Gorton and Phillips Park. "There were some absolute horror stories," he says.

The preliminary findings of his study show that incidents are not being reported.

"Nationally I would say there was 60% under-reporting of attacks and violence against firefighters. We need reporting procedures put in place and the hard facts gathered so we can see the true scale of the problem."

Tony is carrying out a detailed survey of 200 inner city firefighters in Manchester to test their experiences, views and suggestions. He has also made contact with Northern Ireland, South Yorkshire, Cleveland, West Midlands and Scotland and has links into the ODPM, CFA and the fire inspectorate.

"There is a growing awareness within the fire service

community that there is a problem, but that not enough is being done at national level at the moment.

"I am looking at what each brigade is doing, at the NHS zero tolerance attitude to attacks against staff and the new laws in Scotland.

"Having spoken to Greater Manchester Police, there appears to be a massive training need within the fire service in terms of conflict resolution, conflict management, operational procedures and raising awareness. I hope to identify the problems clearly and look at a coherent and all encompassing approach".

**PONTYPOOL, South Wales, 3 November 2004:** crews forced to withdraw from tackling a vehicle fire after coming under attack. Days before in Ely, Cardiff a road was blockaded and crews attacked with bricks and stones preventing them from getting to a house fire.

**STEVENSON,**  
Ayrshire April 28 2004: snipers hiding in a block of flats shoot airgun pellets at firefighters tackling what is thought to be a fire started to lure them into an ambush.

**Tony Bryant is looking for examples of best practice and evidence of attacks, especially some of the more 'creative' types including what may be termed booby traps. These can be sent to: [bryant@manchesterfire.gov.uk](mailto:bryant@manchesterfire.gov.uk)**

**All information sent will be invaluable in assisting to identify the problems and therefore point to the solutions.**

# Regional control room plans are in trouble

Scale of  
problems  
becomes  
apparent  
as four  
regional  
boards  
reject  
'business  
case'

**T**HE government's plan to regionalise emergency fire control rooms in England has faltered over concerns that the plan is neither practically nor financially viable. The scale of the problems became public after the union leaked details of the project's business case that had been hidden from fire authorities by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

At least four regional management boards have refused to endorse the outline business case (OBC): West Midlands, South West, South East, and East of England. Only the North East has endorsed the plan although it did so behind closed doors and has made no public statement confirming its move.

Many of the management boards were scathing about the plans. West Midlands said the financial detail was so poor that reaching a conclusion "on the financial viability of the OBC is impossible".

West Midlands also said that the details of the company option being pushed by ODPM might also be problematic because several important accountancy issues "have not yet been addressed." The board also complained that as there was no detailed regional breakdown of costs it could not assess the impact on the region.

The East of England RMB was angry that the government had refused to provide them with the proposed costing for the plans. It has asked the ODPM how the FBU was able to acquire the information when it was deliberately denied to them.

The South West RMB is also opposed to the government's plans and is convinced regional fire control would be an abject failure. One councillor, Hazel Prior Sankey, a Lib Dem from Somerset, said that councillors should

**CONTINUED PAGE 14**

## PROJECT COSTS COULD TOP

THE final cost of government plans to close all 46 emergency fire control rooms could easily exceed £1 billion according to new research carried out by the Fire Brigades Union.

The £1 billion estimate is based on international research which shows IT projects exceed their original costs estimates by an average of 43%. On this basis the current estimate of £754 million for the new control rooms could easily exceed the £1 billion mark, resulting in cuts to frontline services and increases in council tax.

The government's "worst-case" financial scenario for the project is a cost over run of only £107 million, or around 12%, unfeasibly low when compared to the government's track record in other projects.

The union's research is based on numerous official reports from 2004 and shows recent Government IT projects:

- nearly always result in major cost over runs;
- suffer delays;
- the technology often does not meet expectations;
- projects are abandoned at enormous cost.

FBU President Ruth Winters said: "We have genuine fears this project will see lives lost, cuts to frontline services, technology which does not work and massive overspend.

"That's not scaremongering, that is based on the government's track record on large IT/change projects.

"To subject a 999 instant response rescue service to these sorts of risks is wholly unacceptable. The Government's track record of major failures in this type of project is appalling and deeply worrying.

"They don't listen, they don't learn and they keep wasting public money. We cannot allow a handful of people in Whitehall to force their pet project down the throats of local communities.

"This little Whitehall group have put so much time and effort into the project they have ceased to be objective. A heavy dose of realism is needed for them to see they have convinced almost no one."

The research also shows government does not learn from previous mistakes nor listens to warnings from those who are "off message". The research only goes through failures highlighted in 2004. To go back further only uncovers more and more problems.

Failings highlighted

- Inland Revenue tax credit system,
- Passport office modernisation,
- Operation Telic, the UK's military operation in Iraq,
- Wessex regional health authority,
- London ambulance system,
- Inland Revenue self-assessment,
- Central Veterinary Laboratory database for tracking BSE,
- National Insurance recording system,
- Immigration and nationality directorate,



## **Firecontrol project:**

### **IT background analysis**

FIRE BRIGADES UNION 21 JANUARY 2005



SHOUTREPORTING.CO.UK

**Facing the future: FBU research and the full report the government wanted to hide from fire authorities**

# £1 BILLION NEW RESEARCH SHOWS

- Libra project for magistrates courts in England,
- National probation service's information systems strategy,
- Criminal Records Bureau,
- GCHQ computer modernisation,
- National Air Traffic Services system
- National Strategy for Police Information Systems (NSPIS)
- OASys, the joint probation service and Prison Service offender assessment system

(Hansard 29 Jun 2004: Column 232)

"End-users must buy into the project. If a system is imposed on end-users the risk of failure is greatly increased. Departments sometimes think they have buy-in of end-users whereas they may have the support of groups of end-users who are so familiar with the project that they have emotional equity in its success and cease to be objective.

(House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, Department for Work and Pensions Management of Information Technology Projects: Making IT Deliver for DWP Customers, Third Report of Session 2003-04 Volume 2, HC 311-I)

According to the National Audit Office: "The history of failure of major IT-enabled projects has been characterised by overspend, delays, poor performance and abandonment of projects at major cost."

(The impact of the Office of Government Commerce's initiatives on departments and suppliers in the delivery of major IT-enabled projects Improving IT procurement, NAO, HC 877 Session 2003-2004: 5 November 2004)

The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) said: "Budgets are exceeded, deadlines are over-run and often the quality of the new system is far below the



**Ruth Winter: genuine  
fears project will see  
lives lost**

standard agreed when the project is undertaken.

"A survey of 13,522 IT projects across a number of sectors in the United States was undertaken in 2003 by the Standish Group 13 and indicated that:

- Only one in three projects were successful (delivered to time, budget and specification).
- On average, cost overruns were 43%, time overruns were 82%.
- Only half the required features and functions made it to the final products.
- Average success for projects over \$10 million was significantly lower.

"More recently, a study by Templeton College Oxford, commissioned by Computer Weekly, into IT Project Management indicated that one in 10 IT projects was abandoned, 75% were challenged (projects defined as completed and operational, but over budget, time and/or lacking critical features), and around 15% were successful (defined as completed on time and on budget, with all features and functions as originally specified).

"The study was based on data from 1,500 practising IT project managers across the UK public and private sectors. Taken together, the reports highlight the significant challenges still confronting the IT industry, of which the UK public sector is a significant part."

(House of Commons Work and Pensions Sub-Committee, Department for Work and Pensions' Management of Information Technology Projects: Making IT Deliver for DWP Customers, Volume II Oral and written evidence, HC 311-II, P128 Memorandum submitted by the Office of Government Commerce).

**FROM PAGE 12**

not allow the creation of a public company (The government's preferred option) to build and run the new control centres. Councillors would become directors and if the project failed or the company went bust, they could be personally liable.

The South East RMB, failed to endorse the government's proposals and is seeking further information and clarification from the ODPM.

Yorkshire and Humberside RMB unanimously expressed its "extreme disquiet" at the plans. It did not accept that the outline business case "as currently presented, is achievable financially and practically" and called on the ODPM to withdraw the proposals.

The result has been that the project dates have been put back again. The ODPM will no longer set target dates because it has not met any of the previous ones. The project is now considered to have "fluid" dates – meaning government will make them up as it goes along and then claims they have hit its targets.

But the government is also coming under mounting political pressure. The Tories have said the proposals should be scrapped and accused the government of putting its political agenda ahead of public safety.

The party said the decision to start announcing the location of the eight new regional control centres has been deliberately put back until after the expected general election on 5 May. It claimed fire authorities are already losing control centre staff because of worries about future job prospects and that this was damaging the service.

Conservative fire spokesman Philip Hammond said: "Fire safety is far too important to be subordinated to political agendas. It's time John Prescott abandoned his failed dream of regionalising England and started concentrating on providing effective fire safety."

The move came after a hastily organised House of Commons Standing Committee was set up to look at the ODPM's fire service national framework which includes the plans to regionalise fire controls.

Despite receiving almost no notice, the union gave a detailed briefing to all the committee's MPs on both the National Framework document and the regional control plan.

The union is pressing hard on other political fronts. General secretary Andy Gilchrist has written to all the members of two key Parliamentary committees demanding that they investigate the plans. All MPs on the powerful House of Commons Public Accounts Committee have been contacted twice by the union to ask them to investigate the project. The committee is charged with ensuring that government services provide value for money.

Committee chair Edward Leigh, is discussing the issues raised by the union with the National Audit Office.

The union has also written to all members of the ODPM select committee raising our concerns.

The union's campaign has prompted an extraordinary reaction from the ODPM. After we leaked the details of the business case Local and Regional Government Minister Nick Raynsford, whose brief includes the fire service, was forced into a quickly organised briefing of all MPs.

**TWO MINUTE CAMPAIGN**

**TAKE two minutes to tell your MP this project is a mistake. Simply log on to [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk) and go to "Lobby your MP". All you need do is put in your postcode, the campaign kit will work out who your MP is and you can send him or her a pre-prepared letter outlining concerns.**

**It's that simple and it takes less than two minutes of your time. It's worth it.**

We are told by two of those who were briefed that they had more concerns after the briefing than they had before. Nick Raynsford also wrote an extraordinary letter to the chairs of local fire authorities – leaked to the FBU – blaming them for leaking the outline business case to the union.

Raynsford, said in the letter: "I was very disappointed that the draft outline business case that was circulated in confidence to fire and rescue authority chairs appears to have been leaked to the FBU and is now publicly available on their website."

In fact it could not have been any of the fire authority chairs who leaked the details in the document, as Raynsford well knows. Their copies had the essential financial details blanked out, due to "commercially confidentiality".

Even the chairs of regional management boards were only shown copies of the full document, which were all hastily gathered up after their meeting. So they had no copies to leak either.

In an even more astonishing outburst Raynsford claims that the FBU lied about the document. He said: "The quote 'very high risk' does not appear at all in the document. The phrase 'total project failure' is extracted in isolation from a discussion of risks that all projects face."

Not true. The government's outline business case quite clearly says that there is a "high/very high risk" of "total project failure" in a table on page 52 of the report and in explanatory text below it. And when the authors say "total project failure" they make it clear they mean catastrophic failure.

And the context was an assessment of the risks faced by this particular project, not a generalised discussion about risks faced by all projects.

In fact the risk assessment identified four other areas of high risk where the impact of failure would be substantial. No one reading that part of the document could come to any conclusion other than that the project involved a considerable gamble on several fronts.



# STOP REGIONALISATION of your FIRE CONTROL ROOM



Photo courtesy of Andrew W

**THIS FIRE ENGINE WAS SENT TO YOU BY YOUR LOCAL FIRE CONTROL**

Dear

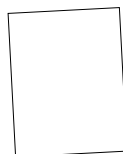
As a constituent I ask for your support in opposing the government's decision to regionalise emergency fire control rooms.

Emergency fire control rooms play a pivotal role in all emergency responses, and as such any reduction in the members of control rooms would have a massive impact on the Fire Services ability to continue to provide a fast and efficient life saving public service.

Regional emergency fire control rooms would mean a slower and inefficient response to an emergency therefore increasing the risk to life.

Yours sincerely

[www.controlcare.org.uk](http://www.controlcare.org.uk)



MP

House of Commons  
Westminster  
London  
SW1A 0AA



**Get control campaign materials from your regional FBU official**

Date

## CAMPAIGN AGAINST REGIONALISATION OF EMERGENCY FIRE CONTROL ROOMS



# Cuts Cost Lives



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION CAMPAIGNING TO KEEP YOU SAFE

# YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK



***How should my pay be calculated for the duration of my maternity leave? When should it start and how will my pension contributions be arranged? How long should it continue and what are my rights on returning to work?***

During your 26 weeks of ordinary maternity leave you are entitled as a statutory minimum to six weeks at 90% of salary followed by the remaining 20 weeks at the flat rate of £102.80. The 26 weeks additional maternity leave is unpaid.

Statutory maternity pay starts when you take maternity leave and is paid in the same way and at the same time as normal salary.

On returning to work after ordinary maternity leave you are entitled to return to your same job and on the same terms. Any service-related rights continue to accrue during ordinary maternity leave, as do pension contributions. So you should be in exactly the same position as you would have been had you not taken maternity leave.

After additional maternity leave, you again have the right to return to your same job and on the same terms and conditions unless your employer can show that it was not reasonably practicable, in which case you have the right to be offered an alternative post that is both suitable and appropriate for you. Neither service-related rights nor pension rights accrue during additional maternity leave, with the exception of the statutory minimum holiday entitlement of four weeks of paid annual leave per year.

***How/when can I and/or my partner (if in the employ of a fire and rescue authority) use my/our parental leave and is it paid?***

Every employee with one year's service has the right to take up to 13 weeks parental leave to care for a child under five (or 18 if the child is under a disability). Both mothers and fathers qualify, as do adoptive parents and those with parental responsibility.

Parental leave is unpaid, unless a national or local agreement has led to payment.

The parental leave regulations presume that local agreements are drawn up to deal with the procedures to follow for taking parental leave. But if there is no local agreement then employees are required to give 21 days notice of their intention to take the leave, unless a father wishes to take leave immediately after the baby's birth in which case they have to give 21 days notice of the expected date of birth. Leave can be taken in one-week slots, and no more than four weeks can be taken in any one year unless this requirement is varied by collective agreement.

Frequently asked questions about maternity, parental and adoption leave

***What are the rights (including leave/pay) of a member going through the process of adoption or fostering a child/children?***

In April 2003 new statutory rights were introduced for parents adopting a child. If a firefighter has 26 weeks service they have the right to take up to six months off work on ordinary adoption leave and a further six months off on additional adoption leave. Where two people are jointly adopting, either of them can take the adoption leave but not both. Ordinary adoption leave is paid at a flat rate of £102.80 per week. Additional adoption leave is unpaid.

Notice of a wish to take adoption leave has to be given within seven days of an employee having been notified of being matched for adoption. The notice must state when the leave is to start and how long it is intended that it will last.

On return from adoption leave, the employee has the right to return to their old job on the same terms and conditions as before. There is an exception, however, after additional adoption leave where it is not reasonably practicable for the employer to allow the person to return to their old job. Here the employer may offer them another job which is suitable and appropriate.

All of this is subject to any preferential terms either negotiated in an individual contract or through the Grey Book.

As well as adoption leave, adoptive parents also have the same rights as biological parents to parental leave, time off in emergencies and to request flexible working under the 2003 Flexible Working Regulations.

Fostering is different. There is no equivalent right to foster leave, nor parental leave. However, foster parents are entitled to request flexible working under the 2003 Regulations.

Local brigade policies may provide more than these minimum legal provisions, including additional pay over and above the statutory maternity pay and additional leave entitlements for fathers. Individual local policies should be consulted for these improvements through your local union office. See your FBU noticeboard for more information and contact details.



# 25 YEAR BADGES



*Brett Allan of Red Watch Clapham (left), is presented with his 25 year medal by Mick Hickson, Group Secretary*



*Martin Marrion (right) from Orpington Branch, London, receives his 25 year badge from National Officer Paul Woolstenholmes*



*Peter Goodfellow (left) from Cannock, Staffordshire, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Russell Stevenson*



*Mick Lee (right) from Sidcup Branch, London, receiving his 25 year badge from National Officer Paul Woolstenholmes*



*John "Bud" Flanagan (left), Strathclyde Fire Brigade, receives his 25 year badge from John Gilluley*



*Preston Branch Secretary Kevin Deacon presents Bro Wilkinson of Preston station with his 25 year badge*



*Branch Secretary Kevin Deacon presents Paul Rose from the Lancashire training centre with his 25 year badge*



*Brothers Gavie (left) and Hope (right) of Roath Station, South Wales, receive their 25 year badges from Mark Holby*



*Mark Ryan (left) and Geoff Curl (right) of Hammersmith Red Watch, receive their 25 year badges from Laurie Brightman*



*Station Officer Bob Steed (right) from Borehamwood, Herts, receives his 25 year badge from Richard Lowther*



*Andy Watson (right) from Borehamwood, Herts, receives his 25 year badge from Richard Lowther*

Please send your photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include **FULL DETAILS** for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/watch etc; where they are in the picture (e.g. :left to right ...); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.

# 0808 100 6061 FBU

## freephone legal advice line



THOMPSONS  
SOLICITORS



The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

### For further help and advice on union services contact your regional office

Regional Office	Address	Telephone No.	Email address
<b>Region 1</b> Scotland	52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow, Scotland, G1 4AA	0141 221 2309	01rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 2</b> N. Ireland	14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn, Co Antrim, BT7	02892 664622	02rs@fbu.org
<b>Region 3</b> Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley, Gateshead, NE11 0AZ	0191 487 4142	03rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 4</b> Yorkshire and Humberside	9 Marsh Street, Rothwell, Leeds, LS26 0AG	0113 288 7000	04rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 5</b> Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire	The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL	0151 357 4400	05rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 6</b> Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire	Mill 3, Unit H3B, Pleasley Vale Business Park, Off Outgang Lane, Pleasley, Nr Mansfield, Nottingham, NG19 8RL	01623 812290	06gen@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 7</b> West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop	195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill, West Midlands, B64 6HE	01384 413633	07rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 8</b> Gwynedd, Clwyd, Dyfed, Powys, Glamorgan, Gwent	Units 38 – 40, Port Talbot Bus. Units, Addison Road, Port Talbot, SA12 6HZ	01639 871013	08rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 9</b> Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk	28 Atlantic Square, Station Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL	01376 521521	10ra@fbu.org.uk 09rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 10</b> London	John Horner Mews, Frome Street, Islington, London, N1 8PB	020 7359 3638	london@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 11</b> Kent, Surrey, Sussex	Fire Station, Coldharbour Road, Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT	01474 320473	11rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 12</b> Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Dorset, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight	The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE	01494 513034	12rs@fbu.org.uk
<b>Region 13</b> Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire	158 Muller Road, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 9RE	0117 935 5132	13rs@fbu.org.uk

## on the move?

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